

A.

The Literature and Theory of Ecstatic Expression

1. CLASSICAL SUFISM UP TO RUZBIHAN

For Sufis, the phenomenon of *shath* as a mode of speech with God must seek its origin, ultimately, in the experience of the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an is the word of God, which has been internalized to form the basis of the mystical vocabulary of Sufism.¹ The model for *shath* is especially to be looked for in the Divine Saying (*hadith qudsi*), the extra-Qur'anic revelations in which Muhammad reported what God said to him. It was the view of Louis Massignon that many of the Divine Sayings were not authentic reports going back to Muhammad, but were the results of the experiences of the early mystics, who circulated these sayings publicly in the guise of *hadith*, before the standardization of the *hadith* corpus.² The recent researches of William A. Graham have shown that this is not necessarily the case. Most of the Divine Sayings can be found in the canonical collections of *hadith*.³ In these canonical *hadith*, there are some that emphasize the possibility of close contact between man and God: "The Prophet said, 'God says: "I fulfill My servant's expectation of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. . . ."'"⁴ Other sayings stress the importance of love (*mahabbah*). ". . . I heard the Apostle of God say: 'God said: "My love belongs by right to those who love one another in Me, to those who sit together (in fellowship) in Me. . . ."'"⁵ The most famous of these Divine Sayings is the saying on supererogatory worship (*hadith al-nawafil*), which expresses an experience in which the worshipper feels the divine presence so strongly

that his volition is taken up by God, and all his actions are performed by God. The essential section is the following: "And My servant continues drawing nearer to Me through supererogatory acts until I love him; and when I love him, I become his ear with which he hears, his eye with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks."⁶ The importance of this Divine Saying for Sufism can scarcely be overestimated. It "forms one of the cornerstones of mystical teaching in Sufism."⁷ As the word of God to the Prophet, this saying stands as a constant reminder of the possibility of union with God through devotion.

As far as we can tell, the first major development of the concept of divine speech was the work of the sixth imam of the Shi'ah, Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765). Respected for his piety and wisdom by all Islamic sects, Ja'far was regarded especially highly by the Sufis, who took his Qur'an commentary as the basis for their growing body of mystical Qur'anic literature. In his exegesis of the theophany experienced by Moses on Mt. Sinai, Ja'far found the key to the nature of divine speech in the words by which God identified Himself. According to Ja'far, when God said to Moses, "I am I, your Lord (*inni ana rabbuka*)" (Qur. 20.12), Moses then realized that

it is not proper for anyone but God to speak of himself by using these words *inni ana*, "I am I." I was seized by a stupor (*dahsh*), and annihilation (*fana*) took place. I said then: "You! You are He who is and who will be eternally, and Moses has no place with You nor the audacity to speak, unless You let him subsist by your subsistence (*baqa*) and You endow him with Your attribute." . . . He replied to me: "None but I can bear My speech, none can give me a reply; I am He who speaks and He who is spoken to, and you are a phantom (*shabah*) between the two, in which speech (*khitab*) takes place."⁸

One of the striking things about this comment is that it reveals selfhood as an exclusively divine prerogative. Only God has the right to say "I." This important point would later be stressed by Sufis such as Abu Sa'id al-Kharraz (d. 279/892) and Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 378/988).⁹ A further aspect of Ja'far's comment that greatly influenced Sufism was the use of the terms "annihilation (*fana*)" and "subsistence (*baqa*)," which refer to the disappearance of the human ego and the manifestation of the divine presence. This would later be articulated by the Sufi Dhu al-Nun (d. ca. 246/859), who was the first Sufi editor of Ja'far's Qur'an commentary.¹⁰ Finally, Ja'far interprets Moses' experience of the divine speech as an event occurring within the consciousness of a human being. One must agree with Nwyia that Ja'far has described

precisely that which the Sufis designate by the technical term of *shath* or theopathic locution. Moses heard in himself the *inni ana rabbuka*, Bistami will say *subhani* (glory be to Me!), and Hallaj, *ana al-haqq* (I am the

Truth), but the phenomenon is the same: in none of these cases is the subject of the sentence either Moses, Bistami, or Hallaj, but it is God who speaks by and through the human consciousness.¹¹

Although he does not use the term *shath*, Ja'far has described this phenomenon in a way that will remain archetypal for later Sufis.

The first widely quoted author of ecstatic sayings was Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. 261/875), the Persian ascetic and mystic (known as Bayazid in Iran), who is most famous for his phrase, "Glory be to Me! How great is My Dignity!" He did harsh penances for many years, and then began to express his spiritual experiences in a most daring language. He spoke of the annihilation of the self, but he also described the experience of ascent into the presence of God, comparable to the heavenly ascension (*mi'raj*) of Muhammad.¹² The great Sufi master of Baghdad, Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd (d. 298/910), gathered and discussed many of Bayazid's sayings in a work called *Tafsir al-Shathiyat* ("Commentary on the Ecstatic Expressions"). Junayd's approach was apparently based on sobriety (*sahw*), as opposed to the intoxication (*sukr*) that he saw in Bayazid, but he regarded Bayazid's sayings as significant data of the mystical life. In some instances, he indicated that Bayazid's sayings did not emerge from the highest level of mystical experience. The largest collection of Bayazid's sayings is the *Kitab al-Nur min Kalimat Abi Yazid Tayfur* ("The Book of Light from the Sayings of Abu Yazid Tayfur"), compiled by al-Sahla'ji (d. 476/1082-3) on the basis of reports going back to Bayazid's descendants. This book has been edited by 'Abd al-Rahman Badawi under the title *Shatahat al-Sufiyah*.¹³ Junayd himself is credited with a number of ecstatic sayings, despite his sobriety. Junayd's commentary, and many of Bayazid's sayings, would not have survived without the valuable work of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 378/988). A native of Tus in Khurasan, Sarraj was widely travelled, and was an authoritative master in Sufism and law. He compiled his *Kitab al-Luma' fi al-Tasawwuf* ("The Book of Glimmerings on Sufism") as a guide to all aspects of Sufism, designed to show that Sufism was completely in accord with the principles and ordinances of Islam. The last of the twelve sections of this book is entitled "The Commentary on Ecstatic Expressions, and Words that are Externally Found Repulsive, Though they are Internally Correct and Well-founded." This section incorporates Junayd's comments on Bayazid, as well as sayings of Shibli, Nuri, Wasiti, and other early Sufis.

Sarraj has developed a very interesting theory of *shath* and the conditions for understanding it. His discussion, which is the earliest treatment of its kind, deserves to be considered here at some length. In the following passage he gives the etymology and definition of the term, and describes its essential features:

If a questioner asks the meaning of *shath*, the answer is that it means a strange-seeming expression describing an ecstasy that overflows because of its power, and that creates commotion by the strength of its ebullience and overpowering quality. This is shown by the fact that *shath* in Arabic means "movement". . . . The flour-sifting house is called "the shaking house (*al-mishtah*)" because they shake the flour so much, above the place where they sift it, and sometimes it spills over the edges from so much shaking. Thus *shath* is a word derived from movement, because it is the agitation of the intimate consciences of the ecstasies when their ecstasy becomes powerful. They express that ecstasy of theirs by an expression that the hearer finds strange—but he will be led astray to his perdition by denying and refuting it when he hears it, and he will be safe and sound by avoiding its denial and by searching out the difficulty in it by asking someone who really knows it. This is one of its characteristics: have you ever noticed that when a great deal of water is flowing in a narrow stream, it overflows its banks? It is then said, "The water *shataha* (overflowed) in the stream." Therefore when the ecstasy of an aspirant becomes powerful, and he is unable to endure the assault of the luminous spiritual realities that have come over his heart, it appears on his tongue, and he expresses it by a phrase that is strange and difficult for the hearer, unless he be worthy of it and have widely encompassed the knowledge of it. And that, in the language of those who are familiar with technical terminology, is called *shath*.¹⁴

This is a learned and sophisticated description that presents a number of concepts central to the understanding of *shath*. The sense of the overflowing and spilling over of a powerful experience is the basic connotation of this term. Yet Sarraj also stresses the component of knowledge in *shath*. It is essential that the enquirer ask one "who really knows it (*ya'lamu 'ilmahu*)," one who has "widely encompassed the knowledge of it (*mutabahhiran fi 'ilmiha*)." Evidently the ecstasy (*wajd*) and its strange-seeming expression are by no means devoid of intellectual content, although the determination of this content may be difficult.

Sarraj goes on to explain the kind of knowledge that is stressed in Sufism, and the place it holds relative to the other branches of Islamic knowledge. He articulates four kinds of knowledge: first, the knowledge of the sayings of the Prophet; second, the knowledge of religious law and ordinances; third, the knowledge of analogy, theory, and disputation, which protects the faith against innovations and error; fourth, and highest of them all, the knowledge of spiritual realities, stations, acts of piety, abstinence, and contemplation of God.¹⁵ This last branch of knowledge is what we call Sufism. Just as in any other kind of knowledge, says Sarraj, one must always go to the experts in that particular science when there is a problem to be solved, so in questions of spiritual realities one must approach the appropriate experts, the Sufi masters, in order to understand properly their sayings on this subject. For this reason, "it is inappropriate for anyone to think that he encom-

passes all knowledge, lest he err in his opinion of the sayings of the elect, and anathematize them and charge them with heresy (*yukaffirahum wa yuzandiqahum*), when he is devoid of experience in their states and the stations of their spiritual realities and their actions."¹⁶ It is from a clearly established theretical position that Sarraj formulates the relation of mystical experience to the standard Islamic religious sciences, and he does so in order to defuse serious accusations that have been brought against Sufis in the past. He further points out that the Sufis are frequently learned in the traditional fields of jurisprudence, *hadith*, and disputation, in addition to their own speciality, while this is not true of the experts in those fields.

Finally, Sarraj elaborates more on the stages of spiritual development at which *shathiyat* are likely to occur:

Shath is less frequently found among those who are perfected, since the latter are fully established in their spiritual realities (*ma'anihim*). It is only one who is at a beginning stage who falls into *shath*, one whose goal is union with the ultimate perfection.¹⁷

Sarraj here contrasts the self-possession of the perfected soul with the soul that is overpowered and cannot refrain from expressing *shathiyat*. He considers this an experience of novices, at least in theory. There will be occasion to question this judgement later on; if, after all, Bayazid's utterances were only the result of immature experiences, why did Junayd and Sarraj consider them worthy of comment? Junayd's explanation of Bayazid's statements is referred to as a *tafsir*, a word usually reserved for commentaries on the Qur'an. If the view of *shathiyat* as characteristic of the beginner is inconsistent with Sarraj's real position, it may well be that his explanation is intended to offer a ready excuse in cases where otherwise heresy would be suspected. Furthermore, Sarraj ultimately derives the *shath* of Bayazid from the celebrated Divine Saying on supererogatory worship (*hadith al-nawafil*), as it obviously implies some sort of approximation to union with God.¹⁸ Yet Sarraj's caution kept him from mentioning Hallaj's ecstatic expressions in his discussion of *shathiyat*, although he elsewhere refers to Hallaj's execution. Evidently Sarraj deliberately avoided reference to the controversial "I am the Truth" of Hallaj, in what is admittedly an apologetic work.

Other writers of this era also discussed *shath*. One of them was Abu Sa'd al-Khargushi (d. 406/1015) a pious Sufi of Nishapur who devoted himself to building hospitals and caring for the sick. His lengthy work *Tahdhib al-Asrar* ("The Refinement of Consciences") evidently has some reference to *shath*, but it remains in manuscript and has not been accessible to me. According to Arberry, Khargushi favored sobriety over intoxication, so he may have been cautious about approving ecstatic ut-

terances.¹⁹ The eminent Sufi biographer Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021) also referred to *shath* briefly, but in the main copied the views of Sarraj.²⁰

A restrained view of *shath* is given by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), who devoted a couple of pages to the subject in his massive encyclopedia *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* ("Revival of Religious Sciences"). There Ghazali showed his great concern about the possibility of misinterpreting these sayings. Ghazali distinguishes two kinds of *shath*. The first kind consists of

broad, extravagant claims (made) in passionate love of God Most High, in the union that is independent of outward actions, so that some go to the extent of claiming unification, rending of the veil, contemplative vision (of God), and oral conversation (with God). Then they say, "We were told such-and-such, and we said such-and-such." In this they resemble al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj, who was crucified for uttering words of this kind, and they quote his saying, "I am the Truth."

Ghazali goes on to say that this kind of talk is very dangerous to the common people, because they lose their chance for salvation, since they think that a purified soul that has attained spiritual states can dispense with required actions. Ghazali concludes from this that "the killing of him who utters something of this kind is better in the religion of God than the resurrection of ten others." The other kind of *shath* is that which is unintelligible to the listener, regardless of whether it is merely confused babbling or something which the speaker comprehends but cannot articulate properly. Since this is bound to be interpreted *ad lib.*, it is not permissible to express such things publicly. Ghazali concludes by quoting sayings from Jesus, to the effect that one should not cast pearls before swine. In this exposition, Ghazali's main concern is to prevent ordinary people from being misled by difficult or strange sayings, even though he implicitly regards them as valid for those who can understand. In the most mystical sayings, however, he sees a real danger of antinomianism.²¹

The next author of importance for the study of *shath* is 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani (d. 525/1131). He was a brilliant and audacious writer; his sayings and his untimely execution will be studied in detail in parts II and III. Although he pronounced many ecstatic sayings, especially in his Persian writings, he only devoted a few pages to the theoretical explanation of *shath*, in his *Shakwa al-Gharib* ("Stranger's Lament"), composed during his final imprisonment. His explanations are very similar to those of Sarraj, and he also refers to the Divine Saying on supererogatory worship as the archetype of *shath*.²²

While Sarraj in his *Kitab al-Luma'* devoted some forty pages, about one-tenth of the book, to a discussion of *shathiyat*, in *Sharh-i Shathiyat* of Ruzbihan Baqli we have a complete treatise filling six hundred pages

in the edition of Henry Corbin. Ruzbihan Baqli Shirazi (d. 606/1209) is the pre-eminent authority on *shath* in Sufism, so that in Iran he is known as *Shaykh-i Shattah*, "Doctor Ecstaticus."²³ His spiritual lineage goes back to Ibn al-Khafif (d. 372/982), one of the last confidants of Hallaj before his execution. Ruzbihan is the most important interpreter of Hallaj; he not only preserves many significant sayings and interpretations of Hallaj, but also brings his own original vision to bear on the subject. He originally composed his commentary on ecstatic sayings as a treatise in Arabic entitled *Mantiq al-Asrar fi Bayan al-Anwar* ("The Language of Consciences explaining their Illuminations"), and it was primarily devoted to Hallaj, with other sayings added for completeness. At the request of his disciples, he translated the book into Persian under the title *Sharh-i Shathiyat* ("Commentary on Ecstatic Expressions"), increasing the volume of the book substantially by giving accounts of his own experiences.²⁴ This work is an extraordinarily rich exposition of the spiritual life, although the idiosyncrasies of style in the *Sharh* are such that "it would be an exaggeration to say that the Persian is much clearer than the Arabic original," as Corbin dryly remarks.²⁵ Yet this work has a strange and fascinating beauty. As Annemarie Schimmel observes,

What so profoundly impresses the reader in Ruzbihan's writings . . . is his style, which is at times as hard to translate as that of Ahmad Ghazzali and possesses a stronger and deeper instrumentation. It is no longer the scholastic language of the early exponents of Sufism, who tried to classify stages and stations, though Baqli surely knew these theories and the technical terms. It is the language refined by the poets of Iran during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, filled with roses and nightingales, pliable and colorful.²⁶

The work is composed on roughly chronological lines. After a long introduction on the aims and theories of this commentary, Ruzbihan describes the origins of *shath* in the theophanic elements of the Qur'an and *hadith*. Then, after discussing the *shathiyat* of the Prophet's companions, Ruzbihan gives a total of 192 ecstatic expressions of forty-five different Sufis, from Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. ca. 174/790) to Abu Sa'id ibn Abi al-Khayr (d. 440/1049). A number of these authors are scarcely known to history, and these are usually represented here by only one or two sayings. Among the most prominent authors are Abu Bakr al-Wasiti (d. ca. 320/932) and Abu al-Hasan al-Husri (d. 371/981), each with over a dozen sayings, while special emphasis is given to the twenty-two sayings of Abu Bakr al-Shibli (d. 334/945) and the thirty-one sayings of Bayazid. Yet the place of honor is reserved for Hallaj. Forty-five of his sayings are commented on, as well as his twenty-five spiritual *hadith* (the *Riwayat*), and the composite book known as the *Kitab al-Tawasin*. Thus one-third of the *Sharh-i Shathiyat* is devoted to Hallaj. In terms of completeness, it

may be pointed out that Ruzbihan did not apparently have access to the works of some Sufis from north-western Iran or Transoxania. He never refers to the Sufi martyr 'Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, whose work shows such strong parallels to his own. As for sources, it is clear that Ruzbihan was thoroughly familiar with the *Kitab al-Luma'* of Sarraj. He not only borrowed from Sarraj a number of technical explanations and commentaries on individual *shathiyat*, but also drew on him for some twenty-eight quotations from five different authors.

In the introduction to his book, Ruzbihan has given an eloquent description of his purpose in clarifying the words of the saints, so that those who do not comprehend will refrain from the error of persecuting the saints;

When I bent my head in contemplation and read in the famous books of the leaders in gnosis, I recognized the disparities in their states through their sayings. It was clear to me that the subtleties and allusions of those who are rooted in gnosis are bestowed by the states that come upon them, and I saw that the understanding of that knowledge is difficult. Language becomes manifest in the form of *shathiyat* particularly for those intoxicated ones who are drowned in the waves of eternity, on account of the thundering clouds experienced in the moment of profound sighs, in the reality of overwhelming raptures. From each of their words, a world of learned men is filled with consternation. The deniers have drawn forth the sword of ignorance from the scabbard of envy, and from foolishness are wielding it themselves. . . . God's jealous ones cried out from the wombs of the hidden world, "O witness of secrets and niche of lights! Free the holy spirits from denial by the bankrupt, show forth the long past of those who kill and crucify in sacrifice! Say the secret of the *shath* of the lovers, and the expression of the agitation of the intoxicated, in the language of the people of the inner reality and the outer law! Say every subtlety in the form of knowledge connected with a spiritual state, and the guidances of Qur'an and *hadith*. (Say all this as) a subtle and marvellous commentary . . ."27

Ruzbihan is inspired to write upon the difficulties of *shathiyat* in terms of his knowledge of the spiritual experiences from which they derive, though they are incomprehensible and frightening to the learned religious scholars. Therefore he is called upon to reveal the connection between the inner reality and the outward law, to explain the knowledge (*ilm*) inherent in the spiritual states, and to show its conformity with the data of revelation enshrined in the Qur'an and *hadith*.

One can see the extent to which Ruzbihan is moved by the persecutions and martyrdoms suffered by the prophets and the saints by the fact that he devotes chapters three and six to a recitation and litany of "the persecution of the folk," as he describes it. Dwelling on the inevitable sufferings of those who are close to God, he makes it clear that uttering incomprehensible spiritual sayings, and being oppressed by those who do

not possess the inner knowledge or science of it, are both part of the destiny of the lovers of God. After proceeding through several chapters that describe the virtues and attainments of "the men of *shath*," Ruzbihan once again shows what an important position Hallaj has in this science of *shath*:

The sole object of all this is the commentary (*tafsir*) of the *shathiyat* of Hallaj, that I might remove the occasion for refutation, and comment upon his enigmas in the language of the religious law (*shari'at*) and the spiritual reality (*haqiqat*). The quality of his sayings is stranger than all others, just as his deeds were stranger than all others, since he mostly speaks in terms of "I-ness (*ana'iyat*). The path to his spiritual reality became incomprehensible in the sight of the imperfect. We are removing the murky doubts from the clear face of reality. Know that that dear one had fallen into "essential union (Pers. *'ayn-i jam'*). He was drowned in the limitless ocean of eternity, pure ecstasy overcame him. He entered into that sea with the quality of creaturehood, and he departed with the character of lordship. From the depth of that ocean he brought forth the pearls of everlastingness. None saw, and none heard, for some said he was a magician, and some said he was a conjurer, some said he was mad, and some said he was a heretic. Few said that he was truthful. Yes, some who were ignorant spoke thus (in condemnation), but since it is the prophetic norm (*sunnah*), prophets are called magician and conjurer."²⁸

As in the case of Sarraj, part of the purpose of Ruzbihan's work is apologetic, as it attempts to remove the basis for criticism by externalists; this is to be accomplished by demonstrating that the *shathiyat* are in conformity, not only with the spiritual reality (*haqiqat*) revealed in a mystical state (*hal*), but also with the religious law (*shari'at*), which is applicable to all of the faithful. Another interesting feature is the characteristic application of the epithet "strange" (*gharib*) to Hallaj, who was frequently termed *al-'alim al-gharib*, or "Doctor Singularis" as Massignon translated it. More importantly, Ruzbihan is here introducing several technical terms that are crucial to his interpretation of the Hallajian *shathiyat*. First is the term *ana'iyat* ("I-ness"), which is the form of the word favored by Ruzbihan; Hallaj uses the term *aniyah*, while later writers use the term *ananiyah*.²⁹ The problematic nature of the ego in an intense confrontation with God is probably the most sensitive topic raised by the *shathiyat* of Hallaj and Bayazid. When the contemplative is experiencing annihilation of his ego and direct converse with God, it is a very delicate question, from moment to moment, as to the actual identity of the speaker. A second important term here is "essential union (*'ayn al-jam'*)," which was used by Junayd to describe the state of Bayazid. According to Ruzbihan, this term does not have the *odium theologicum* of the term "incarnationism (*hulul*)," and he often uses the synonym "unification (*ittihad*)."³⁰ The basic import of these terms is that the most

important topic of *shathiyat* is the possible union of the human with the divine, which is the question of the nature of selfhood.

In the chapter devoted to the meaning of the term *shath*, Ruzbihan begins with the lexicographical example already given by Sarraj, of the mill-house where grain is sifted by shaking. He continues to follow Sarraj's lead, but adds enough of his own interpretation to make a full translation worthwhile:

Then in the vocabulary of the Sufis, *shath* is derived from the agitations of the intimate consciences of their hearts. When ecstasy becomes strong and the light of manifestation becomes elevated in the inmost part of their consciences, by the quality of the annunciation and revelation and strengthening of the spirits illuminated by the inspiration that appears in their intellects, it stirs up the fire of their longing for the eternal Beloved. They reach the vision of the seraglio-curtain of Majesty, and they are moving in the world of beauty. When they see the objects of contemplation in the hidden, and the secrets of the hidden of the hidden, and the mysteries of greatness—intoxication enters in upon them unasked, the soul enters into ebullience, the consciousness enters into commotion, the tongue enters into speech. Speech comes forth from the ecstatic, from his incandescent state (*hal*) and from his spirit's exaltation, regarding the science of the stations (*maqamat*). The outward form of it is symbolic (*mutashabih*). It is an expression the words of which are found to be strange. When others do not understand the inner aspect through the outward forms, and they do not see the method of it, they are led astray to denial and refutation of the speaker.³¹

This description contains basically the same elements found in Sarraj's definition, already quoted, of the overflowing of ecstasy into speech, and the necessity of having the true knowledge or science (*'ilm*) of inner experience in order to understand *shath*. Ruzbihan adds a certain stress on the differentiation of inner experiences, referring to the state (*hal*) and the stations (*maqamat*) of the path, while at the same time transforming this into a characteristically poetic invocation by his series of balanced clauses.

One of the most striking aspects of Ruzbihan's interpretation is his assimilation of *shathiyat* to the expressions in the Qur'an and *hadith* known as enigmatic utterances (*mutashabihat*). Certain verses of the Qur'an, particularly those that symbolically describe God in physical terms (hand, face, sitting on the throne), cannot be taken literally without anthropomorphism. In the following passage, Ruzbihan follows a method of symbolic exegesis whereby the enigmatic sayings of the Qur'an, *hadith*, and *shath* are seen as revelations of the divine Attributes and Names, while the actions of the Prophet Muhammad serve as a perfect mirror for those Attributes. For the common people, it is

necessary to accept the divine origin of these sayings without asking why. Only for the elect is it permissible to delve into interpretation, for they possess knowledge (*'ilm*), a knowledge that by its very nature is esoteric.

If God gives assistance to an insightful person, so that his insight hits the mark, he restrains his tongue from denial and does not inquire into the allusions of *shath*. He has faith in their (the saints') truthfulness in symbolic speech. He escapes from the calamity of denial, because their *shath* is symbolism (*mutashabih*) like the symbolism of the Qur'an and *hadith*. Know that the principle of the unvarying *shath* (i.e., the Qur'an) is in the Attributes; it is the symbolism of the Attributes. In the word of the Messenger (i.e., *hadith*), displaying the secrets of the revelations of the Attributes occurs through the form of actions . . . When the ocean of eternity rolled back from the shore of non-existence, it displayed the pearls of the Attributes and Qualities and Names in an unknown guise. From the pleasure of passionate love, the loquacity of his lover's soul became agitated by the overwhelming fragrances of love. From the ocean of symbolism, he cast forth the *shathiyat* of love.

Both divine and prophetic symbolism come as a testing for the faithful of the community, so that they confess to the outward aspect and do not examine the inward aspect, so that they do not fall into anthropomorphism, imagination, or agnosticism regarding the Attributes, by a denial of symbolic meanings. It is not right for the common people to discuss the investigation of symbolic meanings of exegesis (*ta'wil*). They recite the verse, "They will say, 'Our God, we had faith'" (Qur. 23.109). In the same way, they have no share in the symbolism of *hadith* except faith. The saints, (on the other hand, are referred to in the verse) "and none knows the exegesis of it save God and those rooted in knowledge" (Qur. 3.7). For others there is faith, but for them there is gnosis in the problems of symbolism.³²

As Ruzbihan reveals, the esoteric principle of knowledge looks to this Qur'anic verse 3.7 for its support. The usual reading of this text is quite different; a period is generally placed after "God," so that the full verse reads: "And those with error in their hearts follow the symbolic part, desiring dissension and desiring its exegesis, but none knows the exegesis of it save God. And those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say, 'We have faith in it . . .'" Ruzbihan's reading was, however, supported by one of the earliest Qur'an scholars, Mujahid (d. 104/722).³³ This verse was in fact widely used to support the esoteric principle of knowledge. The Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) maintained that the common people must necessarily read this verse with the period in the middle, so that for them, only God knows the interpretation; the elect must read this verse without the period, since their knowledge is demonstrably in accord with the truth.³⁴ In the same way Ruzbihan insists that the saints have a gnosis that entitles them to interpret the symbolic sayings in Qur'an, *hadith*, and *shath*.

In summarizing his theory of *shath*, Ruzbihan introduces the key terms in his vocabulary of mystical union. Essential union (*'ayn al-jam'*), a classical term used by Junayd, is now presented in company with "the clothing of the human with the divine (*iltibas*)."

The principles of symbolism in *shath* are from three sources: the source of the Qur'an, the source of *hadith*, and the source of the inspiration of the saints. But that which comes in the Qur'an is the mention of the Attributes and the isolated letters, and that which is in *hadith* is the vision of the clothing of the human with the divine (*iltibas*). That which is in the inspiration of the saints is the Qualities of God in the form of the clothing of the human with the divine. This takes place in the station of passionate love and the reality of unification, in gnosis and unknowings (*nakirat*), in divine ruses (*makariyat*). The proclamation of the Attribute belongs to those who are "rooted in knowledge" (Qur. 3.7), for their station is the contemplation of eternity. The deserts on which their paths lie are too hot for conventional wayfarers, who have no aptitude for the comprehension of the enigmas of the symbolism of the Attributes. God's *shath* is that symbolism which proclaims essential union (Pers. *'ayn-i jam'*) and the clothing of the human with the divine Attributes in the station of passionate love; in that station is the knowledge (*'ilm*) which was God's qualification in pre-eternity. With that (*shath*) He discourses to the famous among His lovers . . .³⁵

This passage reveals the breath-taking scope that *shath* has assumed in the mysticism of Ruzbihan. With an authority that follows directly upon that of God and the Prophet, the saints' status and utterances must be accepted by the faith of the generality of believers. This, in effect, makes of the *shathiyat* of the saints a supplementary canon, formed by the uninterrupted contact that God maintains with the elect. The clothing of humanity with divinity, first enacted on the primordial Adam, is manifest in the form of Muhammad, and is created anew, by God's grace, in the saints. Love and unification are equated with "gnosis and unknowings . . . (and) divine ruses," an intriguing combination that is discussed below. After invoking once again the Qur'anic sanction for esoteric knowledge, Ruzbihan effortlessly unites the concepts of essential union, clothing with divinity, and the primordial "knowledge" that was God's in pre-eternity. All these together are nothing but the *shath* of God, by which He converses with His lovers. Ruzbihan's theoretical discussion of the nature of the *shath* does not necessarily solve any problems. Rather, it evokes profound mysteries, which, by their very nature, are resistant to analysis. He does, nonetheless, provide intimations and allusions (*isharat*) that point to the goal of this difficult path.

the anthology, mainly the *Nafahat al-Uns* of `Abd al-Rahman Jami (d. 898/1492), who was also an admirer of Ruzbihan. Dara also used Ruzbihan's Qur'an commentary, of which he had commissioned a Persian translation. The last third of the book concerns Sufis known personally to Dara, and well-known Indian religious figures, such as Kabir and the pandit Baba Lal Das. These contemporary notices are very detailed biographical sketches, and they contain interesting material on some otherwise unknown figures. No longer is Hallaj the central figure, as for Ruzbihan; now Dara's masters, Mian Mir and Mulla Shah, are the most important speakers of *shathiyat*. As far as the understanding of *shath* is concerned, though, this is a somewhat disappointing production. Dara's general assumption is that all famous Sufis must have uttered at least one good saying that can be called a *shath*, and that all such sayings tend to express the oneness of existence, according to the view of Ibn `Arabi. It is interesting to note that, when Dara's friends asked him why he had uttered no *shath*, he replied, "My *shath* is that all of the *shathiyat* are mine."⁴⁹ Since the number of Sufis quoted in the book amounts to ninety-nine, it is tempting to speculate that Dara is likening his *shath* to the unknown one-hundredth "Greatest Name" of God, which unifies the ninety-nine known Names.

These are the literary legacies of *shath*. The term continued to be used, but in a somewhat artificial literary ways. In 1086/1675, the Meccan shaykh Ibrahim al-Kawrani (d. 1101/1688-9) gave a formal defense of a *shath* uttered by one of his Javanese disciples, Hamzah al-Fansuri: "God Most High is our self and our existence, and we are His self and His existence." This saying, far from being ecstatic, is a simple formulation of Ibn `Arabi's theory of oneness of existence. `Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi (d. 1140-1/1728) wrote another defense of this saying in 1139/1727, and it is again an exposition of the theory of Ibn `Arabi.⁵⁰ In 1151/1738, an otherwise obscure Indian Sufi named `Aziz Allah of Bijapur compiled the *Durr-i Maknun*, a collection of *shathiyat* combined with moral and religious advice, and arranged by topic. As with Dara's collection, its chief interest lies in the *shathiyat* uttered by later Indian Sufis. Though it offers no new critical perspective, it deserves a more extended treatment than we can give here.⁵¹ We even see the word *shath* being used to describe an "ascension" poem written by a thirteenth/nineteenth century Sudanese Sufi, which is recited annually at the celebration of the birth of the Prophet.⁵² Such self-conscious literary and theoretical productions seem far removed from the early ecstatic utterances.

B.

Topics and Forms of Expression

Ecstatic expressions, we are told, are sayings that derive from ecstasy. The Sufi interpreters maintain that the sayings in some way describe the original ecstasy, although this description can only be comprehended by one who knows the state from actual experience. Those who are not graced with the knowledge (*ilm*) that God grants to the elect must seek out the interpretation of a qualified master. Since I do not, for the purposes of this study, claim any sort of esoteric knowledge, I therefore approach the study of *shathiyat* through the authoritative works of Ruzbihan and Sarraj. Their general definitions and approaches have been given, and now it will be appropriate to consider the principal topics of *shathiyat*. First, and most important, is the nature of selfhood, divine and human. Second is transcendence of the created, expressed as "the isolation of the eternal from the temporal," which is the way to unification. Third is the paradoxical stress on "unknowing" as the only way to reach real knowledge. Following the discussion of these topics is a consideration of the unusual and provocative forms of expression in *shathiyat*, variously interpreted as divine madness, perception of the divine presence in nature, and saintly boasting. The final section deals with the nature of *shath* as a testimony to the reality and presence of God.

1. SELFHOOD

Probably the most important topic of early *shathiyat* was, as Ruzbihan pointed out, the question of selfhood, or in his terminology,

"I-ness (*ana'iyat*). Over one third of the nearly two hundred *shathiyat* in Ruzbihan's collection are spoken in the first person, making some statement about the nature and experience of the self. Bayazid and Hallaj are most prominent in speaking on this subject. In a particularly condensed saying, Bayazid said, "My 'I am' is not 'I am,' because I am He, and I am 'he is He.'" Sahljai gives a fuller version of the same saying, which may be paraphrased as follows: "My 'I' is not the human 'I,' it is the divine 'I.' Since my 'I' is He, I am 'he is He.'" This saying reports on an experience of deification that the Sufis codified under the phrase, "he is He (*huwa huwa*). This phrase stands for the doctrine of God's gift of divine qualities to the primordial man in the pre-creational state." Bayazid is not asserting that his ordinary ego is God; he says that the only real identity is God, and that God is the only one who has the right to say "I am." Just as with Ja'far al-Sadiq's exegesis of the Sinai theophany, the ego-consciousness of the human disappears under the impact of the divine "I, am I, your Lord." Bayazid's "I" has been replaced with the divine "I," and therefore he says, "I am He; I am 'he is He.'" In another saying, Bayazid indicates that his first presentiments of this union came through the abandonment of a spiritual practice that he had followed for years: "For thirty years I was hidden from God. My absence from Him was my recollection (*dhikr*) of Him. When I refrained (from *dhikr*), I saw Him in every state, to such a degree that it was as if I were He." In this case Bayazid alludes to a state of quasi-identification with God, after his abandonment of the recollection of the name of God, a practice which for him must still have had ego-connections. In both these instances one may point to the elimination of the ego as the prerequisite for experiencing the divine self.

If the boundaries of the human ego are breached, then it is understandable that there should be fluctuation in the perception of the "I." Is one's identity lost forever, or is it replaced by the divine? The same issue occurs in the story of the man who came looking for Bayazid and knocked on his door. Bayazid said, "Who do you want?" The man answered, "I am looking for Bayazid." Bayazid replied, "For thirty years Bayazid has been looking for Bayazid and has not seen him, so how will you see him?" In another saying, made perhaps after his thirty years of incredible austerities, Bayazid addressed God thus: "You were a mirror for me, and then I became the mirror." This metaphor is one of the fundamental symbols in mystical literature throughout the world; the mirror held up to the divine reality denotes the purified conscience that reflects the form of the real self without obscurity or distortion.

As to how this "mirror" appears to the rest of creation, we can see from this famous saying: "He took me up and set me before Him. He said, 'Bayazid! My creatures desire to see You.' I said, 'Array me in Your oneness and clothe me with Your selfhood, and bring me to Your unity, so that when Your creatures see me, they will see You. There it will be You, and I will not be there.'" Later mystics will call this the clothing

with divine selfhood (*iltibas*). Bayazid has also presented transformation of identity in the opposite image of a snake shedding its skin: "I shed my self (*nafsi*) as a snake sheds its skin, then I looked at myself, and behold! I was He (*ana huwa*)."⁶⁰ A remarkable variety of images conveys the sense of radical transformation of selfhood.

Hallaj has also given many subtle comments on identity in his *shathiyat*. In one place he said, "I wonder at You and me. You annihilated me out of myself into You. You made me near to Yourself, so that I thought that I was You and You were me."⁶¹ The complete poem from which Ruzbihan translated these lines conveys Hallaj's intense awareness of God's presence in all of his thoughts and moods. Hallaj seems to refer here to an imagined union, and Ruzbihan explains it as the fancy (*wahm*) born of human weakness, and Hallaj adds, "The intoxicated speak in this way frequently, even though they know that the Essence of divinity is unattainable by the created."⁶² If there was still any ego left in him, he was not sufficiently purified of self, and must undergo complete self-negation. In a bolder metaphor, Hallaj said, "My spirit mixes with your spirit, in nearness and in distance, so that I am You, just as You are I."⁶³ This is actually a truncated version of a poem in the *Diwan*, which is even more remarkable in its imagery: "Your spirit was mixed in my spirit, just like wine and clear water, and if something touches You, it touches me, for You are I in every state."⁶⁴ In another poem transmitted by Ruzbihan, Hallaj put it thus: "Praise be to Him whose humanity manifested the secret of the splendor of His radiant divinity, and who then appeared openly to His people, in the form of one who eats and drinks!"⁶⁵ These verses have been criticized, not only by the Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyah but also by Hallaj's friend Ibn al-Khafif, because they seemed to imply a semi-Christian doctrine of incarnation (*hulul*).⁶⁶ Ruzbihan explains, however, that Ibn Khafif either did not realize that these verses were by Hallaj (whom he revered as "a divine master"), or he was thinking of the effect of this verse on the externalists, whose inner conviction is weak. The Sufis understand this verse as an allusion to the station of clothing with the divine (*iltibas*), and they hold that this poem describes the primordial man, the eternal *logos* of Muhammad, as the manifestation of divine qualities.⁶⁷

Another controversial *shath* of Hallaj was a letter by him, produced at one of his trials, which began, "From the Compassionate, the Merciful, to so-and-so . . ." When he was charged with claiming divinity for himself, he replied, "No! But this is essential union (Pers. *'ayn-i jam*). None understands this but the Sufis."⁶⁸ In this case Hallaj used the term "essential union" to identify the spiritual state that was the source of this letter. In another poem, Hallaj said,

Is it You or I? That would be two gods in me;
far, far be it from You to assert duality!
The "He-ness" that is Yours is in my nothingness

prevented from seeing the deification (unification) of Adam, because, secure in the pride of his own knowledge, he had refused to submit to unknowing. Here Hallaj has been playing with the grammatical meaning of *ma'rifah* and *nakirah* as signifying not only knowledge (gnosis) and ignorance (unknowing), but also the definite noun and the indefinite noun in Arabic grammar.¹¹⁵ The definite noun, of which one has knowledge (*ma'rifah*), is preceded by the definite article *al-*, the Arabic letters *alif* and *lam*, thus conferring ordinary existence on the noun. To deny the existence of something, one uses the word "no" (just the reverse, *la* or *lam-alif*) as a generic negation, followed by the noun in the indefinite (*nakirah*). If the excessively literal Iblis had grasped the full meaning of negation, he could have followed the path of transcendence to its ultimate conclusion: "The beginning (of the path) is symbolizations (of the divine Attributes, *mutashabihat*), and there are clearly beheld visions in the symbolizations. The end (of the path) is unknowings, because of the holy manifestation of the Attributes (which cannot be comprehended directly except by unknowing)."¹¹⁶

4. MADNESS, AUDACITY, AND BOASTING

So far the discussion of *shathiyat* has dwelt on extremely subtle and abstract subjects—identity, transcendence, unknowing—but there is another side to the phenomenon of *shath*. There are many examples of *shath* expressed, not through speech, but through action, and in addition, there are sayings that are rude, violent, and shocking, hardly the sort of thing one expects of respectable mystics.

There is one class of such audacious acts that falls under the heading of apparent madness or loss of consciousness of one's surroundings. For instance, Abu al-Husayn al-Nuri on one occasion received a large inheritance. He proceeded to throw the money into the Tigris, crying, "My friend, you thought to deceive me with this much!"¹¹⁷ Critics blamed Nuri for his insane wastefulness, but Ruzbihan praised him for his self-possession in eliminating a veil between him and God; Nuri had deliberately counted out the coins one by one before throwing them away. It is likely that Nuri was addressing God as the friend who had attempted to deceive him thus, for God lays many a ruse (*makr*) for the unsuspecting. Another example, more understandable as a case of being overwhelmed by ecstasy, is that of Hisham ibn 'Abdan al-Shirazi, who refrained from food, drink, and prayer for a year; ecstasy is considered an excuse for not performing obligatory prayers, by analogy with madness.¹¹⁸ The story of Abu Sahl al-Baydawi gives a rather different twist to the problem of ecstasy. His disciple in attendance was a farmer, and since it was time for him to water the crops, he was in a quandary

whether to desert his entranced master or let his crop fail. The master opportunely emerged from ecstasy and told the disciple to go attend to his fields.¹¹⁹ Another interesting story concerning actions during ecstasy is the tale of Abu Bakr al-Tamistani. Once while wandering he fell in with a band of drunken thieves, who were having a music party. Because of the intensity of his delight in the music, which increased his ecstasy, the thieves derived such benefit that they all repented from their evil way of life.¹²⁰ Shaykh Ibrahim al-A'raj, imam of the great mosque of Shiraz, one day during prayer had a conceited thought about the fact that he was the imam. In contrition, he began at once to walk on his hands in front of the first line of worshippers, much to their amusement, and he never acted as imam again.¹²¹ These incidents are all the sort of thing that a madman might have done. Like the madman, the ecstatic who is unconscious of the world is not responsible for his actions. People who acted in this way were considered to be holy fools, and they could say the most outrageous things, even insult God, without being punished.¹²²

Another class of audacious actions is that inspired by an overwhelming sense of the divine presence in nature. Some of the mystics who had this experience expressed it by addressing God in whatever form they saw or heard Him. Theologians considered the resulting utterances to be evidence of belief in the incarnation of God in bodies. Here are a few examples: "They called Abu al-Gharib (al-Isfahani) an incarnationist (*hululi*), because when clear water was trickling over a lawn, he laughed sweetly with the lip of love, from the ebullition of love; he alluded to 'essential union (Pers. *'ayn-i jam*')."¹²³ Wasiti explained this by producing another *shath*, saying, "Sometimes existence laughs with the mouth of power, with the mouths of the Lord." Other instances of hearing the voice of God in nature are mentioned in the cases of Abu Hamzah al-Isfahani, who responded with "Here am I, Lord (*labbayk*)!" to the bleating of al-Muhasibi's sacrificial goat, and Nuri, who made the same reply to the barking of a dog.¹²⁴ According to Ruzbihan, these sayings derive from the state of essential union, and are really on the highest level of *shath*.

The surprising quality of these actions of *shath* is matched by the audacious and aggressive nature of some of the sayings. A perfect example of this is the encounter between Hallaj and 'Ali ibn Sahl in Isfahan. 'Ali was sitting with a circle of his followers, when Hallaj approached and sat down in front of him, saying, "You, shopkeeper! You speak of gnosis, while I am alive? Between sobriety and ravishment (*istilam*) there are seven hundred steps that you do not know or even scent." 'Ali replied to him, "You should not be in a town where Muslims live." Although Hallaj did not understand these words, since 'Ali spoke in Persian, the message must have been clear. Having been advised that his life was in danger, Hallaj left town that night.¹²⁵ Ruzbihan sees in this a reflection of the divine jealousy, for a *hadith* has it that "if the hidden saints (*abdal*)

became aware of one another, some would hold the others' blood as licit." The misunderstandings of Moses and Khidr (Qur. 18.60-82) are also examples of holy persons not seeing eye to eye. Further, the two men exemplify the two widely separated states to which Hallaj alluded, sobriety (Ali) and intoxication (Hallaj).¹²⁶ Another such encounter took place in Shibli's assembly, when a man fainted in apparent ecstasy. Shibli commanded that the man be thrown into the Tigris, saying, "If he is sincere, he will escape, like Moses, and if he is a liar he will drown, like Pharaoh."¹²⁷ The man evidently survived his ordeal; Shibli found him the next day working in his smithy, and when he passed Shibli a piece of red-hot iron with his bare hand, Shibli calmly took it and tucked it into his sleeve. Ruzbihan concludes, "This action is from the jealousy of gnosis, and jealousy is an attribute of God. . . . This wrangling (*munaqarah*) of the prophets and saints is exemplary (*sunnah*)."¹²⁸ Sometimes this rivalry extended retrospectively, and included deceased saints. Wasiti said, "They all died in delusion, up to Bayazid, and he also died in delusion."¹²⁹ Likewise Shibli said, "If Abu Yazid were here, he could become Muslim with the aid of our children."¹³⁰ These are all examples of divine jealousy, which makes the lover give himself wholly to the Beloved, without admitting any thought of others.

In some cases, the audacity of *shath* even turns against the role of the Prophet. Bayazid heard someone saying, "All creatures will be under the banner of Muhammad!" He replied, "My banner is greater than the banner of Muhammad!"¹³¹ Ruzbihan explains this as Bayazid's being filled with the light of divine manifestation after abandoning the two worlds; he speaks with the presumptuousness of the servant of a great king, who identifies himself with his master. Once Hallaj was accused of pretending to prophethood. He said, "Shame on you! You make so little of my worth!"¹³² The implication of this remark is that it would be beneath his dignity for Hallaj merely to claim to be a prophet; it is he, after all, who said, "I am the Truth." The audacity of this saying goes so far beyond the bounds of propriety that even Ruzbihan handles it gingerly, reminding the reader of Hallaj's praises of Muhammad in the *Tawasin*, and mentioning Hallaj's discussion with the Christians of Jerusalem, in which he declared himself a humble follower of Muhammad. Some cases of audacity verge on the grotesque, as in Shibli's saying, "God has some servants who could extinguish the fires of hell by spitting into hell."¹³³

The audacity of *shath* is also, of course, directed against God. Abu al-Hasan al-Kharaqani represented himself as having wrestled with God, in a story reminiscent of Jacob's: "One morning I went out, and God came before me. He wrestled with me and I wrestled with Him. I continued wrestling with Him until He threw me down."¹³⁴ Bayazid even treated the divine word with contumely. Once when he heard the call to prayer, "God is great," he said, "I am greater than He!"¹³⁵ In the same way, when he heard the verse, "Surely thy Lord's assault is terrible" (Qur.

85.12, trans. Arberry), Bayazid replied, "By His life! My assault is more terrible than His!"¹³⁶ Hellmut Ritter has discerned in these sayings of Bayazid the experience that Ruzbihan calls *iltibas*, being clothed with divinity: "He is then clothed with the qualities of God, and he sometimes feels this clothing with the qualities of God more vividly than the qualities of the transcendent God, who is spoken of in the Koran and in the call to prayer."¹³⁷ Sometimes the more daring *shathiyat* of this type have been too much for later Sufis to accept. Bayazid's statement, "I set up my tent over against the cupola (over the throne of God)," was considered by al-Harawi as infidelity according to the *shari'ah* and distance from God according to the *haqiqah*.¹³⁸

These audacious and aggressive sayings are not without precedent in Islamic literature. We can find the rhetorical basis for this audacity in the ancient boasting-contest (*mufakharah*) of the pre-Islamic Arabs. In these contests, poets would lavishly praise the honor of their own tribes and heap abuse on their opponents, in a ritual performance that had a distinctly religious (or socio-religious) character. According to Bichr Farès, in this kind of sacred feud, "the individual forces are stimulated to the extent of bringing about a complete transfiguration of the individual."¹³⁹ The similarity between this pagan vaunting-match and the wrangling (*munaqarah*) of the saints is too obvious to be denied. In fact, the moderate Sufi author Abu al-Najib al-Suhrawardi (d. 563/1168) corroborates this in his widely used manual of conduct for Sufi novices, *Adab al-Muridin*. In the lengthy section on the dispensations (*rukhas*) or permissible deviations from the rules, Suhrawardi says the following:

Among the (dispensations) are boasting and publicizing one's claim (to spiritual states). In this matter, their standard is that one should intend to publicize the bounties of God, who is exalted above it. "Indeed speak of the bounty of your Lord" (Qur. 93.11). That is (permissible) in the raptures of a spiritual state or in a boasting-contest (*mufakharah*) with an adversary.¹⁴⁰

Suhrawardi goes on to quote magnificent boasts made by the Prophet in a state of expansion, and he recalls an incident in which the poet Hassan ibn Thabit, on behalf of Muhammad, triumphed over the Banu Darim tribe in a boasting-match. It is precisely the same sort of phenomenon that we see in the *shathiyat* contests of the saints, when one outrageous statement is outdone by the next.

If we can believe the biography of Ruzbihan, the sober Suhrawardi got a strong dose of this type of behavior when the two men met in Medina. They got into a debate on the subject of the relative merits of the sober wayfarer and the enraptured saint as models for imitation. The argument grew heated, as Suhrawardi challenged the younger man's sanity (Suhrawardi was thirty-two years older), and Ruzbihan was overcome by a spiritual state. He said, "May God hide my state from you! I am stan-

ding on the mountain-top, and you are sitting on the flat ground!" He then marched off alone into the desert. Three nights later, Suhrawardi had a dream in which the angel Gabriel made clear to him that Ruzbihan's status was far beyond that of all the saints of the age. On Ruzbihan's return, Suhrawardi found him listening to music. Before Suhrawardi could say a word, Ruzbihan told him, "Unless they show you Ruzbihan's state from heaven, they will not make you acknowledge us a second time." Ruzbihan then caught him up in the dancing and the weeping, presumably this time to reveal this state to him directly and not through a dream.¹⁴¹ While this story is partly a hagiographic glorification of Ruzbihan by his descendants, it gives an authentic picture not only of the attitudes of the two Sufis, but also of the form that this boasting frequently took.

Was this an authentic form of spiritual behaviour? Ibn 'Arabi thought it was a self-indulgence. He said, "Ecstatic expressions indicate one's degree relative to God by following the path of pride (*fakhr*). That is done by likenesses and images. God forbid that His people get mixed up with likenesses or start boasting! For this reason *shath* is a frivolity of the carnal soul . . ." ¹⁴² Yet in Ruzbihan's mind, wrangling (*munaqarah*) was a prophetic norm to be followed as part of the imitation of the Prophet's example. It was not a personal expression, but a formal and stylized ritual, in which divine inspiration revealed itself by boasting. Doubtless this sort of ritual activity could be abused, but in theory Ruzbihan's view is defensible. Beyond this, the explanations presented here have also stressed the influence of the divine Attribute of jealousy and the overwhelming effect of being clothed with divine selfhood. In a suggestive remark, Hallaj pointed out how love creates intimacy with God in the innermost layer of the heart. "Love (*mahabbat*) is from the seed (*habbat*) of the heart. The seed of the heart is its pith (*lubb*), the pith is the locus of the subtlety (*latifah*), the subtlety is the place of God, and the place of God is dalliance (*tamalluq*) with Him."¹⁴³ It is also, one suspects, the freedom of this intimate relationship with God that confers on the lover the liberty to speak as he wills.

5. TESTIMONY

Beyond these interesting forms of expressing *shath*—apparent madness, audacity, and boasting—the most powerful *shath* is expressed in the form of testimony to the continuing activity of God. There are several texts from Hallaj and Bayazid that emphasize the theme of testimony and that show once again the importance of selfhood and

B.

Hallaj

Hallaj's understanding of faith was thoroughly in consonance with the Sufi position just outlined. For Hallaj, *iman* was the first step on a ladder leading to overwhelming love of God (*walah*) and astonishment; in addition, when fear of God (*taqwa*) combined with perfect gnosis, the state of total surrender (*istinya*) to the Qur'an became possible, "and this is the reward of the stations of faith."³⁸ Yet Hallaj also spoke of faith as only a beginning, for "he who looks for God by the light of faith is like him who seeks the sun by the light of the stars."³⁹ Although ordinary faith is inferior to gnosis, faith in a more general sense includes all relationships to divinity: "No one can claim God in any way except by faith, for in reality, there is no claim (to having attained God)."⁴⁰ Nonetheless, insofar as faith is identified with "speech, action and intention," it is occupied with intermediaries (*wasat*), with something other than God.⁴¹ According to Hallaj's doctrine of "the eclipse of intermediaries (*isqat al-wasat*)," at the dawning of the experience of the realities (*haqa'iq*) of faith, these outward expressions of faith are obliterated from consciousness, and remain only in form (*rasm*).⁴² Although this view is not precisely antinomian, it is certainly a significant relativization of the law. The *shari'ah* is still obligatory, but it has receded in importance before the overwhelming meeting with the Master of the *shari'ah*.

Hallaj's strange utterances on faith and infidelity need to be understood in terms of the characteristics of *shath*, as discussed in part I; we shall note in particular the relevance of the topics of knowledge and unknowing, transcendence of duality, and audacity in the special form of

blame. The characteristics of the highest form of *shath*, that is, *shath* as the divine word, *shath* as testimony, and the nature of selfhood, are not very prominently involved in Hallaj's statements on faith and infidelity. The implication here is that the ecstatic sayings on faith and infidelity refer to the experience of the nothingness of creation (*fana*), not that of deification (*baqa*).

There are two sayings of Hallaj that present faith and infidelity in close dependence upon the topics of knowledge and unknowing and the transcendence of duality. The first, preserved only in an ambiguous Persian recension, is as follows:

The knower (*arif*) looks upon his initial mystical states and realizes that he does not have faith except after he becomes infidel. . . . In the beginning the poor man takes a position with respect to something. Then his position becomes advanced with respect to that thing. In the end he becomes infidel. Don't you see that if he goes back on that (*agar baz-i an gardid*), he has been infidel?⁴³

Although the terminology of this saying is terribly vague, I interpret this to mean that initial faith, the creature's acceptance and recognition of the creator, is a partial kind of knowledge, which, from the viewpoint of the real knower, nonetheless appears to be ignorance and unconscious rejection of the truth. When the real knower looks back on his first attainments, he realizes intensely the dualistic limitations of that first intimation called faith. And just as unknowing is prerequisite to real knowledge, so a realization of the limitations of one's initial faith is necessary in order to transcend its intrinsic duality. "In the end he becomes infidel" because he now realizes his nothingness, and can call himself "infidel" to signify that he knows that his faith is no faith at all. Like the impotence, blindness, and astonishment of unknowing, becoming infidel is a descent into the dark night of the soul.

Hallaj further explains the relationship between infidelity, knowledge, and duality, in a famous letter addressed to one of his disciples.

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, who manifests Himself (*tajalla*) through everything to whomsoever He wishes. Peace be unto you, my son. May God veil you from the exterior of the religious law, and may He reveal to you the reality of infidelity (*haqiqat al-kufr*). For the exterior of the religious law is a hidden idolatry, while the reality of infidelity is a manifest gnosis (*ma'rifah jaliyah*). Thus, praise belongs to the God who manifests Himself on the head of a pin to whom He wishes, and who conceals Himself in the heavens and the earths from whom He wishes, so that one testifies that He is not, and another testifies that there is none other than He. But the witness in negation of Him is not rejected, and the witness in affirmation of Him is not praised. And the purpose of this letter

is that I charge you not to be deceived by God, and not to despair of Him; not to covet His love, and not to be satisfied with not being His lover; not to utter affirmation of Him, and not to incline towards negation of Him. And beware of affirming the divine unity! Peace.⁴⁴

In this important passage Hallaj has indicated the purpose of his strange venture into self-proclaimed heresy. His "reality of infidelity" is "a manifest gnosis," that is, a form of the essential gnosis that can only be bestowed by theophany or divine manifestation (*tajalli*). It is the kind of gnosis that sees the absolute nothingness of creaturehood and realizes that separate existence constitutes infidelity. The outward, literal aspect of the law he calls "a hidden idolatry (*shirk khafi*)," just because in itself it is inextricably bound up with duality and opposition. As long as one is preoccupied with the details of the law, one will be unable to focus exclusively on God. Here Hallaj hovers on the threshold of divine grace without expectation or despair, in a renunciation of the dualistic attributes of createdness.

The convergence of unknowing and transcendence of duality is shown in the doctrine of the coincidence of opposites in God. Hallaj enunciated this principle clearly in saying, "in none but Him can two (opposite) attributes mingle at once, but He is not thereby in contradiction."⁴⁵ One such example has already been quoted, "Knowledge is concealed within ignorance." Now it is applied to *iman* and *kufir*: "Infidelity and faith differ in name, but in reality there is no difference between them."⁴⁶ This *coincidentia oppositorum* is a transcendence of duality that only takes place on the level of the divine Essence in itself, the *haqiqah* or transcendent reality.

When transcendence of duality is considered as the process of transcending, it applies to the level of creation, and implies a radical rejection of any hidden idolatry; this is a necessary implication of the concept of *tawhid*, literally "making one." Junayd's definition of *tawhid* thus applies to both the state and the process of transcendence: "*Tawhid* is the isolation of the eternal from the temporal." In addition to meaning the isolation of the divine reality in itself, "transcending duality" means the rejection of the idolatry and infidelity of considering any temporal and partial creature as self-sufficient. When Shibli was asked to explain *tawhid*, he said, "He who answers a question about *tawhid* is a heretic, he who knows *tawhid* is a polytheist, he who does not know it is an infidel, he who points to it is an idol worshipper, and he who asks about it is ignorant."⁴⁷ Every one of Shibli's phrases denounces the attempt to confine the eternal in temporal relations.

The negative aspect of *tawhid* may be called *takfir*, i.e., "calling something *kufir*," "accusing of infidelity." *Takfir* as practised by Sufis is quite different from the anathemas hurled at each other by rival theologians; spiritual *takfir* is a process of purification that aims at the elimination of duality and hidden idolatry in oneself. It was in this sense

that Shibli said, "Sufism is idolatry, since it is the safeguarding of the heart from the vision of that which is other (than God), and there is no other."⁴⁸ All such denunciations can be considered as spiritual *takfir*. A fine example of this kind of *takfir* is the lofty credal statement of Hallaj:

He who thinks that the divine mixes with the human, or the human mixes with the divine, is unfaithful (*fa-qad kafara*). For God has isolated Himself in His Essence and His Attributes from the essences and attributes of creatures. He does not resemble them in any respect, nor do they resemble Him in anything. How could there be any resemblance between the eternal (*al-qadim*) and the temporal (*al-muhdath*)? He who claims that the Creator is in a place or on a place or is connected to a place, or can be conceived of in the mind or imagined in thought, or is included under attribute and quality, is idolatrous (*fa-qad ashraka*).⁴⁹

The reliance of this *takfir* on Junayd's *tawhid* is striking. Perhaps the most remarkable *takfir* made by Hallaj is the anecdote told by his friend Ibn Fatik, who came to visit while Hallaj was reciting the Qur'an at full length. When Hallaj had finished, he turned to Ibn Fatik, laughing, and said, "Don't you see that I pray to try to please Him? But he who thinks that he has pleased Him has put a price on His pleasure." Then he laughed again and recited these verses:

When a youth's ardent love reaches perfection,
and ecstasy makes him to forego union,
Then he attests in truth what love attests to him —
the prayer of lovers is just infidelity.⁵⁰

Absorption in ritual prayer is attachment to intermediaries that obscure the realities of the spirit; Hallaj here blames himself for placing too much importance on the effect of prayer, as the youth in the poem became too involved in the thought of his own love—all deviation from the way to the Beloved is infidelity.

Another important aspect of Hallaj's use of "infidelity" and "faith" is his desire to be blamed as an infidel and killed as a martyr. His longing for martyrdom is presented in a series of texts so striking and so dramatic that I propose to translate them in full, because of their intrinsic interest. Here is another episode narrated by Ibn Fatik, in which Hallaj shows the earnestness of his desire for self-sacrifice.

One day I called on Hallaj at a house belonging to him at a moment when he was distracted. I saw him standing on his head, saying, "You who make me near in my mind by Your Presence, and who set me at a distance by Your absence as far as is eternity from time—You manifest Yourself to me so that I think of You as the All, and You withdraw Yourself from

me so that I deny Your existence. But Your Absence does not continue, Your Presence does not suffice, war with You does not succeed, and peace with You is not secure." And when he sensed that I was there, he sat upright and said, "Come in, don't be afraid!" So I came in and sat before him, and his eyes were like two burning flames. Then he said, "My son, some people testify against my infidelity (*kuf*) and some of them testify to my saintliness (*wilayah*). And those who testify against my infidelity are dearer to me and to God than those who affirm my saintliness." Then I said, "Master, why is that?" he said, "Those who testify to my saintliness do so from their good opinion of me, while those who testify against my infidelity do so from zealous defense of their religion (*ta'assuban li-dinihim*), and he who zealously defends his religion is dearer to God than him who has a good opinion of anyone." Then he said, "Ibrahim, what will you do when you see me crucified and killed and burnt? For that will be the happiest day of all the days of my life!"⁵¹

In this passage, there is a delineation of the decisive effects of God's absence and presence on human hearts, just as in the letter on "the reality of infidelity." In this case, Hallaj is making it clear to Ibn Fatik that he wants to be labelled an infidel and die.

In another extraordinary episode, which took place at the tomb of the great jurist Ibn Hanbal, Hallaj again expressed this desire, but in a moment of intense personal prayer, after which he cautioned an eavesdropper not to mention the incident. Here is the account as transmitted by the prominent judge Ibn al-Haddad al-Misri:

I went out one moonlit night to the tomb of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (God have mercy on him!), and I saw there from far off a man who was standing, facing in the direction of prayer. I got closer to him without him knowing, and it was al-Husayn ibn Mansur, who was weeping and saying, "You who made me drunk with Your love, and who astounded me on the plains of Your nearness, You are the One isolated in eternity, the One who alone is established on the throne of truth. Your support is through justice, not through levelling; Your distance is from isolation, not from separation; Your presence is through knowledge, not by transit; and Your absence is from veiling, not from departure. There is nothing above You to overshadow You, nothing below You to lessen You, nothing behind You to overtake You, nothing beyond You to comprehend You. I beseech You, by this hallowed dust and these sought degrees, that You do not reject me except after ravishing me from myself, and that You do not make me see my soul again after veiling it from me; and multiply my enemies in Your land, and those intent on killing me." But when he sensed me, he turned and laughed in my face, and came back and said to me, "Abu al-Hasan, this state in which I find myself is the first stage of aspirants." In amazement I said, "Master! If this is the first stage of aspirants, what is the stage of him who is beyond it?" He replied, "I lied! This is the first stage of the submitters to God, nay, I lied again! This is the first stage of the infidels." Then he

cried out three times and fell, and blood streamed from his throat. And he motioned with his hand that I should go, so I went and left him. When I saw him the next morning at the Mansur mosque, he took my hand and led me to a corner, and said, "By God! You must not tell anyone what you saw me do yesterday!"⁵²

Once again the fervent prayer begs the omnipotent God to bring about the lover's doom. In this orison, Hallaj also calls upon God to annihilate his limited selfhood and not allow it to exist again. The quest for ravishment of self, which is one of the main characteristics of *shath*, is here linked with the desire for martyrdom. Hallaj's final words to the eavesdropper, Abu al-Hasan, show by their spontaneity the profundity of the experience that led Hallaj to call himself an infidel. Full of the feeling of dust and ashes, he calls himself the lowest of the *muslimun*, then the lowest of the *kafirun*.

Hallaj's desire for martyrdom is further expressed in another episode, which contains the famous poem on ravishment of selfhood discussed in the section on selfhood in part I, above.

I saw al-Hallaj enter into the Mansur mosque and say, "People, listen to one word from me!" Many people gathered around him, some being his supporters and some his detractors. He said, "Know that God most high has made my blood licit for you; so kill me!" Some of the people wept. Then I stepped out from the crowd and said, "Master! How shall we kill a man who prays and fasts and recites the Qur'an?" He replied, "Master, the reason for which blood should be spared is beyond prayer, fasting and reciting the Qur'an; so kill me! You will have your reward, and I will be happy. You will be fighters for the faith, and I will be a martyr." Then the crowd wept, and they followed him to his house when he left. I said, "Master, what does this mean?" He said, "There is no duty in the world more important for Muslims than killing me." Then I asked, "Of what sort is the path to God?" He replied, "The path to God lies between 'two,' but 'there is no one else with Me.'" Then I said, "Explain!" He answered, "He who does not understand our allusions will not be guided by our expressions," and he recited,

"Is it you or I? . . .
so take away by Your grace,
my 'I am' from in between."

Then I said, "Will you comment on these verses?" He answered, "Their meaning is not consigned to anyone except the Messenger of God, by actual experience, and me, in emulation of him."⁵³

Here Hallaj has begun to reveal publicly his desire for martyrdom and for ravishment of his selfhood, but he is still enigmatically refusing to reveal his purpose in so doing. Is it only because of his private unease

that he formed this purpose, in a pathological urge to self-destruction? What is the "reward" that he hinted at, which will accrue to the Muslim community if he is killed as an infidel? Will his death accomplish the ravishment for which he longs?

Louis Massignon, in an astonishing and brilliant reconstruction, has presented a compelling interpretation of Hallaj's desire for martyrdom as a blood-sacrifice designed to bring about a vicarious atonement on behalf of all Muslims. Standing with the pilgrims on Mount 'Arafat, on his last pilgrimage in the apocalyptic year 290/903, "Hallaj, like the saints who preceded him, must express the victimal desire to become absolutely poor, transparent, annihilated, that God expose him under the appearance of weakness (*'ajz*), of death, of condemnation, of guilt, signifying thereby the approach of His Hour, that of the Judgment."⁵⁴ In this view, Hallaj sought to make himself totally empty, lost in the bewilderment of unknowing, and hence to be rejected by all: "Guide of the bewildered, increase me in bewilderment; if I am infidel, increase me in infidelity!"⁵⁵ What was Hallaj trying to accomplish here, at the high point of the *hajj*, on the ninth of Dhu al-Hijjah, when Muslims address God in penitential prayer? In one verse, he explains,

You who blame my longing for Him, how long can you blame? If you knew what I meant, you would not blame me. The people have their pilgrimage, but I have a pilgrimage to my Love. They lead animals to slaughter, but I lead my own heart's blood. There are some who circle the Ka'bah without the use of limbs; they circled God, and He made them free of the sanctuary.⁵⁶

In his spiritualization of the *hajj*, which ultimately cost him his life, Hallaj evidently saw himself as a sacrificial victim, the replacement for the sheep and the goats that were to be slaughtered the following day on 'Id al-Adha. Whether Massignon can be followed completely in his view of Hallaj's sacrifice is open to debate; some have felt that Massignon read Christian doctrines of atonement into the "passion" of Hallaj. Of course, Hallaj did say, "My death will be in the religion of the cross," and he told his surprised interlocutor, "you should kill this accursed one," pointing to himself.⁵⁷ There is no question of "Christianizing" in Hallaj, however; if he used the language of "Christianity," it was in order to shock his listeners.⁵⁸ Hallaj's whole effort to get himself condemned as a *kafir* is summed up in this verse: "I became infidel to God's religion, and infidelity is my duty, because it is detestable to Muslims."⁵⁹ We may take a phrase from another branch of Sufism to describe this particular motive in Hallaj: it is *malamah*, "self-blame," a practice designed to draw the censure of the community by outwardly disgraceful behavior, while inwardly and secretly performing all religious duties with the utmost sincerity and devotion. While Hallaj was not part of the *Malamati*

Sufi group that originated in Nishapur in the third/ninth century, this term aptly characterizes his wish to be considered an infidel. His desire for martyrdom, to suffer under the law, takes *malamah* to its extreme. It is not accidental that Hallaj has been called *Sultan al-Malamatiyin*, "King of the Self-blamers."⁶⁰

Hallaj's self-blame in terms of infidelity was not merely antinomian, however. As one who invoked the piety of people like Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Hasan al-Basri, Hallaj sought to invest the *shari'ah* with the utmost meaning, and he consciously sought out and practised the most difficult devotions recommended by each school. This is how he explained it to one of his attendants:

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Hulwani said: I attended upon al-Hallaj for ten years, and I was one of the people closest to him. And from all that I heard from people who slandered him, and who said that he was a heretic, I began to have doubts in myself, and so I put him to the test. One day I said to him, "Master, I want to learn something of the esoteric teaching." He replied, "The false esoteric or the true esoteric?" As I stopped to reflect, he said, "Indeed, the exterior aspect of the esoteric Truth is the law (*al-shari'ah*), and he who fully realizes the exterior of the law will have its interior aspect revealed to him, and this interior aspect is the knowledge of God. But the false esoteric has an interior more hateful than its exterior, and its exterior is more repugnant than its interior, so have nothing to do with it. My son, I shall mention something to you from my experience of the exterior of the law. I have not adopted the teaching of any of the religious leaders; I have only taken from every sect the hardest and most difficult part of it, and I now follow that. I have performed no obligatory prayer without washing myself first and performing ablution. Now I am seventy years old, and in fifty years I have performed the prayers of two thousand years, and every prayer is the fulfillment (*qada'*) of a previous one."⁶¹

Hallaj's servant evidently had heard the gossip that accused Hallaj of being an agent of the Qarmati insurgents, who were feared and hated as enemies of the caliphate and opponents of the externalist legalism of the Sunni majority. al-Hulwani's question was an attempt to see if Hallaj was really an esoteric (*batini*), a follower of the Isma'ili heretics. This suspicion was thoroughly dispelled by Hallaj's stern and uncompromising reply. Hallaj's insistence on the law is in fact a necessary preliminary to his demand for martyrdom, as shown by his praise of his attackers who "zealously defend their religion."

Nonetheless, as we have seen, there is a strand in the thought of Hallaj that redirects attention away from ritual to the sole object and goal of that ritual. He states the principle of "the eclipse of intermediaries" here: "He who considers actions is veiled from the Object of action, and he who considers the Object of action is veiled from the vi-

sion of the actions."⁶² In a letter to one of his disciples, Hallaj put it in greater detail thus:

Know that man remains standing on the carpet of the *shari'ah* as long as he has not reached the outposts of *tawhid*. But when he attains it, the *shari'ah* is eclipsed from his vision, and he occupies himself with the glimmerings that dawn from the mine of sincerity. And when the glimmerings come upon him continuously, and the dawns pursue him uninterruptedly, affirmation of unity (*tawhid*) becomes a dualistic heresy (*zandaqah*) for him, and the sacred law a folly. Then he remains without identity or trace. If he observes the law, he observes it only in form, and if he utters the affirmation of divine unity, he only utters it by force and compulsion.⁶³

Familiar themes are alluded to here. Moving from the safe enclosures of the *shari'ah* to the desert wilderness of true *tawhid* is an entry into unknowing and astonishment. With the onset of the luminous experiences of reality, the *shari'ah* is cast in to the shade (not abolished). At this point, spiritual *takfir* condemns the outward affirmation of the divine unity and the outward obedience to the letter of the law as wholly inadequate, as "heresy" and "folly." The one who has reached this point may perform the outward requirements to the letter, but without attachment. It is this rejection of the ultimate importance of the external religious practices that has always alarmed the upholders of tradition, who see in it an encouragement to neglect basic religious duties. But again, Hallaj was not insensitive to this problem, and he insisted on full application of legal discrimination on the social level; anyone who follows the path taken by Hallaj must himself be prepared to accept the legal consequences. "He who distinguishes between infidelity and faith has committed infidelity, but he who does not distinguish between the infidel and the faithful has committed infidelity."⁶⁴ In other words, spiritual *takfir* is to be applied against anyone who tries to distinguish between the opposites that are unified in the divine *haqiqah*, but legal *takfir* must be levelled against anyone who fails to distinguish between obedience and rebellion on the level of the *shari'ah*. Fine talk about mysticism is no excuse for neglecting to distinguish good from evil.

This, at least, is the structure of the phenomenon of Hallajian infidelity: self-annihilation through unknowing, realization of the *coincidentia oppositorum* in God, self-blame and desire for martyrdom, and fulfillment of the law (though it be ambivalent). As Kraus and Massignon put it, in the path of the elect, "deification is not realized except under the appearance of a denial of the law (*kufr, zandaqah*), an anathema incurred by love, a momentary ravishment of the intellect."⁶⁵ The precise degree to which this remarkable ideal was realized in action cannot be known. After the prayer at 'Arafat, Hallaj spent some years in hiding from the police, under a false name, and at the trial that sentenced

him to death, he protested his innocence vehemently. In the great prayer the night before the execution, he seemed to give way to despair, as he murmured over and over, "a ruse, a ruse (*makr, makr*)," but at last he arose, shouting, "Truth, truth (*haqq, haqq*)!" After reaching the height of the reality of infidelity, he said that same night, ". . . and I have hope in You, for I am faithful. . . ."66